



& Workers' Liberty

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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REVOLT IN THE DEGREE FACTORIES

On Monday 12 March Universities UK and the University and Colleges Union (UCU) announced they had reached an "agreement" at ACAS in the ongoing dispute over the USS pension scheme.

As details of the "deal" came to light, UCU members across the country were at first confused as to why the UCU would have agreed such a deal, and then angry.

Ten days of strikes had forced employers first into negotiations, then into making an offer. But the offer was a bad one.

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Pic: twitter.com/EdiSolidarity

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Trump threatens trade war



Trump's new tariffs are a boost not to jobs, but to barriers between nations

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Tories welcome Saudi prince



The government has rolled out the red carpet for the Saudi Crown Prince.

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Black Panther: behind the utopian vision



Sameem Rahimi reviews 'Black Panther' and examines the politics in the film.

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Join Labour! Debate over General Secretary post

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Italian election shows impasse of left

By Hugh Edwards

Italy's election (4 March) resulted in hung parliament, with no party getting enough votes to form a government. It will take weeks and maybe months for a government to emerge.

The election highlighted in the most dramatic way the politically disastrous state of the country's trade-union movement.

The crisis of the reactionary centre-left government and the ruling Matteo Renzi-led Democratic Party (PD) has been consummated in an historic rejection by the mass of the Italian people; in a triumph for the two most virulent "anti-system" populist forces, rivals united in their anti-working class, anti-trade union and racist beliefs and actions.

Matteo Salvini (Northern) Lega (a coalition partner of Berlusconi's Forza Italia) dominates almost all of the north, while Di Maio and Grillo's 5 Star Movement hegemonises the south and the islands.

The Italian left occupies a position of political and institutional marginalisation on every front, exposing the working class and every progressive cause to the mercies of whatever governmental contraption the representatives of the

bourgeoisie can cudgel out of the present impasse.

Two graphic examples sum up the depth of the danger. Following the attempted murder of eight young West Africans by a neo-fascist thug in Macerata, a magnificent march of 20,000 anti-racists defied a ban by the government. The town's first citizen, elected in 2015 with nearly 60% of the vote, was a progressive reformer whose administration had welcomed migrants.

The tenor of the anti-fascist march had seemed to indicate something of that. But in the elections the tub-thumping ethnic cleanser Salvini got 22%, cynically exploiting the opportunity the arrest of two young Africans re the murder of a young women in the town a few days before.

The second example is the statement from the leader of the country's largest trade union, CGIL, Susanna Camusso.

In a recent interview, she was asked if the tsunami of support from her members for Salvini and Di Maio was a vote against trade unionism. She replied, "No, I don't see it that way — in fact, it confirms our ability to protect our members regardless of political alignment ...

and sustains our view that the ordinary citizen ought to become more independent from politics, to stand closer to our unions and members in disputes and struggles."

Camusso openly supported the former PD dissidents huddled together in the pathetic "Free and Equal" outfit of Grasso, D'Alema and Bersani. Like her, they were complicit in sustaining the Renzi government and its austerity measures, which probably accounts for their outfit's disastrous performance: it polled 3.3%.

POTERE AL POPOLO

The newly-formed Potere al Popolo (power to the people) constituted by an aggregate of a Neapolitan Social Centre, Communist Refoundation, PCI, Eustop and others had generated growing radical enthusiasm in large assemblies across the country.

They said they were modelled on the lessons and experience of Momentum.

But the hoped-for electoral breakthrough didn't materialise, with a dismal 1.12% score, indicating that in Italy no real mass organised social-political terrain similar



Foreground Di Maio, background Salvini

to the Labour Party/Momentum axis exists beyond the archipelago of far-left groups.

Furthermore, despite the cruel experience of decades of failure of similar projects (involving many of the same people and groups), the intent of the new force was, as before, to create a movement of protest, around the most immediate, minimum demands of the day, a method summed up by "we don't have to say what we are, we have to do it; we have to stop evoking ideals, we have to produce them, the distinction between reform and revolution happens in practice." As

Bernstein put it, "the means are everything, the end nothing".

The rulers of the country now find themselves in a new stage of a crisis that has its origins in the demise of the First Republic and the social, economic and political events that brought it crashing ignominiously to the ground.

The Second Republic of the centre-left and centre-right began to fall apart with the onset of the 2008 financial crash, and fell at last three years later with the recession in Italy.

The supersession of Renzi beckons a Third Republic, according to Salvini and Di Maio, but the political pillars on which it might stand are not yet in place, lacking the forces of the right around Salvini to form a government that could undertake the austerity measures that Italian and European capital demand.

What is obvious is that there will be no solution to this crisis without the re-emergence of working-class-led struggle with as its cardinal principle the goal of socialism as the means of putting an end to the nightmare of Italian capitalist decline and decay.

Will the counter-revolution be tweeted?

By Martin Thomas

False news spreads on Twitter much faster than truth. Researchers at MIT have published the results of research into 126,000 fact-checkable stories tweeted or retweeted between 2006 and 2017 (bit.ly/false-t).

True stories rarely reached more than 1000 people through retweeting; the top 1% of false-news tweeters cascades got to 10,000 or more.

True reports took six times as long as falsehoods to reach 15,000 people. Falsehoods were 70% more likely to be retweeted than truths.

This was not because false-news tweeters were generally more active than truth-tweeters. On the contrary, they were less active, had been on Twitter for less time, and had fewer followers.

The best guess is that falsehoods spread faster because they were more "novel" and stirred up more aggressive emotions — surprise and disgust — while the truths elicited sadness, joy, or anticipation.

Politics is the bulkiest subject-area for false news, and false-news tweets have increased in number quicker than true tweets.

Thus the drenching of political life, especially in the USA, with false claims half-believed or quarter-believed, but in any case widely spread. Around 30 to 40% of registered Republicans in the USA still say that Barack Obama was born outside the USA, and became president only thanks to a conspiracy to ignore the US law which says presidents must be born in the country.



49% of Republicans reckon it either definitely or probably true that "leaked email from some of Hillary Clinton's campaign staffers contained code words for paedophilia, human trafficking and satanic ritual abuse".

Readers of *Solidarity* will recognise the equivalents, within the activist left, of the malign rumours there used in competition between bourgeois parties.

Some of this is not new. "Falsehood flies, and the Truth comes limping after it", wrote Jonathan Swift in 1710, and other versions of the adage have been famously (though apparently wrongly) attributed to Mark Twain.

Socialists frequently talk of "the lies of the bourgeois media", and with good cause. Paradoxically, though, the rise of mass-circulation newspapers, radio, and TV probably (at least in bourgeois-democratic countries) diminished the speed-advantages of falsehood over truth, compared both to Swift's time when rumour spread mostly by word of mouth and today when it spreads by social media.

Bourgeois newspapers and TV channels falsify mostly by omission, selection, slanting, and twisting, rather than by direct falsehood. Concerned, to some extent or another, for reputations which have to survive over years, and open to criticism by competitors available in the same outlets (sometimes including the socialist press), they cannot lie as recklessly as the malicious or easily-swayed tweeter.

The decline in newspaper-reading, and the rise in the number of people who get news only or mainly through social media, creates obstacles for democrats and socialists.

It is not a product of technology alone. Technology also brings the fact-checking websites used by the MIT researchers, which enable us to check dubious stories much more readily than people could in Swift's word-of-mouth days. It brings the availability on the web of a range of serious bourgeois newspapers from across the world, such as previously only a few customers of a few special newspaper shops in a few cities could read.

If we want to pass on scuttlebutt uncritically or even eagerly, these days we can do that quicker. If we want to check, we can do that quicker too.

It may well be the counter-revolution, rather than the revolution, that primarily gets tweeted. The revolution will prevail when socialists can convince a sufficient body of labour-movement people to think, to check, to read critically.

Bad pay deal for NHS

By a health worker

Recent press reports have indicated a possible very bad pay deal arising from talks between NHS employers and the health unions: a 3% pay rise for this year, followed by two years of 1-2%, and losing a day's annual leave.

With inflation running at 3% we face three years of falling pay. And the GMB estimates health workers have already had a real terms pay cut of £2,000 in last seven years. The initial reaction from many NHS workers to these reports has been complete disdain.

The deal may also include abolition of Band One (the lowest band on the pay scale). This is necessary, but in reality, with a vast increase in numbers of apprentices, outsourcing and a rush of NHS Trusts setting up subsidiary companies to employ ancillary workers, NHS employers are finding new ways to institutionalise low pay.

A couple of better points may be a reduction of increments in bands and a one-off payment for some, but the detail isn't clear. Whether this will be enough for unions to sell the deal to health workers remains to be seen.

Last year the government said they would be prepared to fund an end to the pay freeze for health workers if further "efficiencies" were found. The NHS has already

been squeezed into crisis. Any pay increase (which this deal doesn't seem to include), must be fully funded by the government. Any unfunded increase in pay will be followed by greater workload, less support for staff and service cuts.

The shortage of workers, made worse by Brexit, is a fundamental part of the current NHS crisis. Health Education England figures show that the number of staff leaving the NHS reached 16% last year. The NHS is short of 42,000 nurses, midwives, physiotherapists and occupational therapists. 15% of nursing posts in London and a third of paramedic posts across the country are vacant.

Health unions may promote this deal as better than we've had. Workers are already organising online, with a petition against the cut to annual leave reaching 10,000 signatures in two days. We need to take this organising into our union branches.

Last year the health unions said to NHS employers that they wanted their members to receive a 3.9% pay rise in 2018-19 plus a further £800-a-head payment, to help make up for the fall in the real value of salaries since 2010.

Any deal should be measured against that, with no acceptance of eroding our much-needed leave. Any campaign on pay must be tied into the growing fight for the future of the NHS.

Revolt in the degree factory

By a UCU member

On Monday 12 March Universities UK and the University and Colleges Union (UCU) announced they had reached an "agreement" at ACAS in the ongoing dispute over the USS pension scheme.

As details of the "deal" came to light UCU members across the country were at first confused as to why the UCU would have agreed such a deal, and then angry.

Ten days of strikes had forced employers first into negotiations, then into making an offer. But the offer was a bad one. Pension contributions would go up to 8.7% from 8%; the accrual rate would go down to 1/185 salary a year from 1/75, and pensions would only be guaranteed on salaries up to £42,000 (about the third point on the main lecturer scale) instead of the current £55,000 (roughly the top of the senior lecturer scale).

Worse, the deal was a "transitional" one for three years, with a dangerous prospect that after that the whole basis of defined benefit pensions could be lost. It stuck within highly conservative costings that have been widely challenged as "recklessly prudent" by pensions experts. The agreement also talked of lecturers rescheduling classes that had not happened during strikes.

Within a couple of hours of the

proposed deal being announced, branches were already mobilising against it on social media. The inclusion of a clause that UCU should encourage members to reschedule teaching without any guarantee of no deductions attracted particular anger. It was clear that the employers are on the back foot and that settling now would waste the dispute's momentum and disillusion new activists and thousands of new members.

Overnight #NoCapitulation trended on Twitter as UCU members and students took to social media to discuss the deal with each other and to call on the UCU's Higher Education Committee to reject it. On Tuesday morning mass meetings were held on picket lines up and down the country, and one after one votes came in of members rejecting the deal. Several hundred UCU members and supporters gathered outside UCU's headquarters in London to protest outside the Higher Education Committee meeting.

That the strike was not called off on Monday evening is significant. It meant UCU members were on picket lines on Tuesday morning, discussing the agreement rather than isolated at home or in small groups at work.

By the time the UCU's Higher Education Committee met with branch representatives mid-morning on Tuesday, approximately 46



Left: London UCU demonstration, 28 February. Right: Aberdeen students in occupation.



out of 64 universities on strike had held votes which rejected the agreement. The branch representatives' meeting voted unanimously to reject the deal and reopen negotiations and the Higher Education Committee quickly followed with a vote to reject the agreement and keep the strikes on.

MORE ACTION

UCU has already authorised a further fourteen days of action to hit exams and assessment after Easter if the dispute is not settled.

Planning for those now takes priority. Thousands of staff have joined UCU over the course of the

dispute. Targeted campaigns have forced a number of hard-line Vice-Chancellors to back down on punitive pay deductions for action short of strikes, and to promise that strike deductions will be spread over several months. These need to continue.

The strikes have been highly revealing of university management's real attitude towards workers. The Vice-Chancellor of St Andrew's University sent round an email saying that paying higher pensions would put equality and diversity initiatives under threat. After a social media storm she issued an apology. At Oxford University management used a procedural motion to prevent academics voting on a pensions motion, only for staff to walk out of the meeting and hold the vote outside the building. The VC later accepted the result of the unofficial vote. Sheffield, Keele, Sussex, Southampton and Glasgow have all retreated under public pressure. Revelations in the press about the enormous pay packages and perks VCs enjoy by comparison to their counterparts in the NHS and local authorities have further put them in the spotlight.

Many staff are now saying they no longer feel any goodwill towards their institutions and will not be working unpaid overtime in future. A 2016 report by UCU found that academic staff worked an average of 50.9 hours a week (contracts typically give a guideline of 35 to 37.5). Two-thirds of staff reported unmanageable workloads at least half the time, and 28.8% said workloads were unmanageable all or most of the time. If the strike makes staff more confident about refusing work that would take them over their basic hours, that will be a very good thing.

Casualisation has also been a theme of discussion during the strike. Many strikers have no idea whether they will be able to stay in university jobs long enough for pensions to be relevant but have joined the picket lines in solidarity and because they know the outcome of this strike matters for working conditions across HE. At the University of Kent management have agreed not to deduct any pay from striking Graduate

More reports of occupations and student-worker solidarity
bit.ly/2Im4RXT

Teaching Assistants. The rejected settlement included only a weaselly promise from employers to consider not penalising GTAs. That was nowhere near good enough.

The rejection of the deal is positive, but it is not the end. It is not a given that UUK won't double down: the fight could get harder in the next few weeks. With the Easter break coming up there is a danger that the current momentum could become demobilised. Discussions about what should happen next, and what strategy to take after Easter are urgent. Up until this point the strike has benefited from being a national strike, with all universities being on strike at the same time. The strategy after Easter will have to take into account different assessment timetables at different universities, and some of the profile of national strikes could be lost.

The UCU has been in a poor state for many years, and this strike has rightly broken from a years-long pattern of one-day strikes where little is won. The mobilisation which was able to turn around the UCU's position on the agreement in less than 24 hours is the basis of a potential wider rank-and-file shake up of the union more generally.

The strike has had a huge impact on the consciousness of UCU members. Three and a half weeks have been spent organising picket lines, holding teach-outs, responding to management threats, organising with students, and engaging in endless discussions about the dispute, its direction, and wider issues about Higher Education. Many have commented that this strike has been their first opportunity to talk to colleagues about things other than the mundane bureaucracy of university life. Teach-outs have provided a glimpse of how universities could look different.

During this dispute university workers and students have shown that they are the university.

There is a world beyond the campus

Sahaya James, from the National Campaign for Fees and Cuts, on why she is campaigning to be President of the National Union of Students.

Students don't live in hermetically sealed containers, undisturbed by the oppression and exploitation around the world. Yet too often student unions behave as if they do.

We constantly hear the rhetoric of the "average student" concerned only with the costs of printing and nights out, as if campuses aren't implicated in the injustices which define our society.

When institutions like Oxford and Cambridge invest millions in offshore funds to develop deep sea drilling, climate justice is an issue for our student unions. When institutions act as border guards, monitoring the attendance of international students and facilitating deportations, borders are an issue for our student unions. We have a duty to recognise how our institutions perpetuate global systems of exploitation and force them to enact change.

As NUS President, I want to be part of a student movement that transforms society, not just our campuses.



As over one hundred women are on hunger strike in Yarl's Wood detention centre for basic rights and dignity, it's more vital than ever that the NUS shows real and practical solidarity to the movement to shut down all detention centres. I will not pay lip service to these causes, I will join in the demonstrations, as I have done as an activist.

Moreover, we need to fight against the implementation of further restrictions on immigration at every turn. Borders necessitate violence: the violence of being denied free healthcare, the violence of an immigration raid, the violence of deportation. Immigration controls have transformed everywhere from hospitals to homeless charities into functioning as border guards, leaving many migrants with nowhere to turn. Our fellow students have been harmed by these measures.

It's also time to be serious about climate justice activism. Over one

Support these candidates!

- We are also calling for support for Ana Oppenheim (National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts) for VP Higher Education, Zamzam Ibrahim for VP Society and Citizenship, Ali Milani for VP Union Development, Eva Crossan Jory for VP Welfare, and NCAFC candidates Justine Canady, Monty Shield and Stuart McMillan for the "block of 15".

Football versus fat-cat developers

By Phil Grimm

A dispute between Dulwich Hamlet Football Club and the owners of their stadium in south London sharply escalated in the week beginning 5 March.

Property developer Meadow Residential has evicted the club from their Champion Hill ground. A subsidiary of the company also wrote claiming to have trademarked "Dulwich Hamlet", demanding the club no longer use the name.

Five years ago, US property developers Meadow Residential bought the Champion Hill ground for £5.6 million. They promised that their plans to redevelop the land would include a decent provision of social housing, as well as facilitating a new home for the team nearby. While Meadow eyed the lucrative development of an inner London location, they treated the club relatively benignly.

FUNDS

This changed sharply when Southwark Council turned down the development application after the plans failed requirements for affordable or social housing.

Meadow began throwing their toys out of the pram and lashing out at the club to put pressure on the council to let them build unaffordable homes on the site.

Funds for the football team became restricted as the developers claimed more of the match-day revenue and refused to cough-up for the running of the club. Even a £10 million bid by Peckham local Rio Ferdinand

to save the club was rejected by Meadow. With the new threat of eviction, the continued existence of the club is in serious question.

This has all happened despite Dulwich being, in many ways, a model of how football can be done in a better way. In recent years, non-league Hamlet has seen a huge rise in attendance and publicity. Once mostly known as a little-known curiosity with a pink kit and a distinguished pre-war history, Dulwich now attracts much press attention, and crowds routinely reach the thousands.

This popularity has been built on a friendly, ebullient, self-mocking fan culture. Many supporters get involved in local causes, collecting for food banks, supporting striking workers and making a determined effort to make the terraces welcoming for women and LGBT people. Even the smallest football clubs draw on the passionate involvement of many people, but Dulwich Hamlet has gradually expanded into being a real community club and a beloved social resource for thousands of people.

Encouragingly, there's been a massive response to the threat to the club.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan and several local MPs have called on Meadow to sell the ground on. Southwark Council is considering a proposal to buy Champion Hill. Bigger clubs and celebrities like Gary Lineker and Peter Reid have expressed their disgust at Meadow's actions. Arch-rival club Tooting and Mitcham have kindly agreed to share their ground with Dulwich for the remainder of the season. A "Save Dulwich Hamlet"



campaign has been launched, and a demonstration planned for 17 March.

Of course, there are far worse problems under capitalism than the mismanagement of small football clubs. But in its way, Dulwich's predicament is a vivid illustration of what is

sick with our current system.

A system in which the rich are able to spitefully trash something that brings warmth and joy to a community, all in pursuit of a grubby profit.

Pseudo-political Disneyland

LETTERS

I really enjoyed reading Dan Katz's article on pulling down statues. He makes a number of valid points.

Maybe I can add a few details. After it was pulled down, Stalin's statue in Budapest was smashed up and one part of it was used as an improvised public urinal. Pretty soon after, all parts of the statue disappeared including the boots which initially remained stuck on their plinth. Rumour has it that everything was melted down.

There is a vivid reconstructed scene depicting the toppling of the Stalin statue in Marta Mészáros' film 'Diary for my Father and Mother' which mirrors the toppling of the Tsar's statue in the opening of Sergei Eisenstein's 'October'.

Unfortunately, the history of statues in Hungary and their treatment gets messy. When I worked in Budapest in 1992 I often took my lunch break in a small park sitting on a bench, eating my salami, next to a statue dedicated to the memory of the Hungarian volunteers who fought in the Spanish Civil War on behalf of the Republic. I grew to love that statue despite the fact that it was bloody ugly — the Hungarian volunteers were rendered as "Michelin men", not what I would have chosen.

I returned a few years later to find the statue gone. It had been moved to a so-called Statue Park just outside Budapest, in fact it is the first statue you see on entering. I have always thought it a disgrace that

these anti-fascist heroes, the finest of their generation, should be lumped together with Stalin and his Hungarian acolytes such as the repulsive Matyás Rákosi (whose bald pate earned him the nickname — "arse head"). The statue park is really just a stupid pseudo-political Disneyland. There is no social or political context for the statues, and everything is treated as if it was part and parcel of Stalinist Hungary, including a statue to the revolutionaries of 1919 — a full 29 years before Hungary succumbed to Stalinism in the post-war period. The boots have miraculously reappeared but they are replicas.

There is no accounting of the past, no attempt at understanding what happened, just one more tourist attraction to add to the list. And of course, there are the usual T-shirts, mugs and other touristy nick-nacks. In the meantime, under the right wing government of Viktor Orbán monuments to fascists and nationalists go up all over the place.

Just for the record: 965 Hungarians fought for the Spanish Republic. Of these 260 never made it home. Most of these fell at the battle of Huesca. When the Civil War ended those who made it across the border into France were interned. In 1945-6 most of the surviving volunteers were able to get back to Hungary, only to find that they were under suspicion by the Stalinist authorities.

30-35 were imprisoned and at least one (László Rajk) was executed.

John Cunningham

Corbyn's international friends

Michael Elms' article ('Corbyn and the Czech spy scandal', 28 February) makes reasonable points (the right-wing press are out to get Corbyn, and they are not above twisting facts).

It is an article any self-respecting Corbynista would approve of.

Except there's one problem Michael fails to mention: what was Corbyn doing meeting a Czech embassy official? Yes, I know Corbyn wasn't spying for the Czechs — but that doesn't completely resolve the matter.

Czechoslovakia was a police state and its embassy officials were agents of that state and, consequently, bitter enemies of ours. Around the same time that Corbyn was meeting the Czech secret agent (who did Corbyn think he would be meeting?) I was raising money for the Czech workers' opposition; others were protesting outside the embassy for workers' rights, or demanding rights for the Roma people, or Jewish people (the Czech Stalinists had demolished many synagogues and spied on Jews).

Now Corbyn is not a Stalinist. But he does seem to make regular mistakes when choosing his international friends.

It is a real scandal, for example, that Corbyn appeared on the Iranian state's Press TV — and did so even after the station had been banned in the UK for filming the "confession" of a journalist which had been extorted under torture.

Or, closer to home, Corbyn has chosen key aides who are unreconstructed Stalinists (Seamus Milne and Andrew Murray).

And on a similar theme John McDonnell



Milne and Corbyn

announced last weekend that — following the attempted murder of Sergei and Yulia Skripal — Labour MPs would no longer appear on RT, the Russian state's television propaganda outlet. McDonnell stated, "We have treated it like every other television station."

Minimally John McDonnell has not been paying attention. RT and Press TV are absolutely unlike CNN or the BBC. RT and Press TV are the outward-facing propaganda fronts for aggressive, authoritarian states.

Dan Katz, South London

Trump threatens trade war

On 1 March Donald Trump announced tariffs of 25% on steel imports, 10% on aluminium imports.

Other governments are alarmed by this shift towards trade war. The OECD, a consortium of the world's 35 strongest capitalist economies, has criticised the move. Further argument will come at the meeting of the finance ministers and central bank governors of the G20 (20 strongest countries) in Buenos Aires on 19-20 March.

Socialists should be alarmed too, for our own distinct reasons.

Socialists do not endorse capitalist free trade. We are not for the unfettered rule of markets. We are for fettering market forces through social-provision and worker-protection policies, as international as possible. As the working class gains political strength, we aim to make democratically-decided social solidarity the chief regulator of economic affairs.

We are not necessarily opposed, even, to all bourgeois protectionist policies. "Nursery tariffs", allowing new industries to make a start in weaker countries, are not our way of doing things, but they have a rationale, and we would not condemn them in favour of undiluted free trade.

TARIFFS

In general, however, our approach is as Marx outlined in 1847:

"Do not imagine, gentlemen, that in criticising freedom of trade we have the least intention of defending the system of protection. One may declare oneself an enemy of the constitutional regime without declaring oneself a friend of the ancient [i.e. autocratic or aristocratic] regime..."

"In general, the protective system of our day is conservative, while the free trade system is destructive. It breaks up old nationalities and pushes the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the extreme point. In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution. It is in this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, that I vote in favour of free trade".

The German Marxist movement, in its heyday before 1914, campaigned against the Ger-

man government's protective tariffs, so much so that when Lenin in his pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* wanted to cite an easily-grasped example of how socialists should conduct a political campaign, he chose a German socialist anti-tariff effort.

Free trade first spread in the mid-19th century. Tariff protection became more popular with governments later in the 19th century, but on the whole tariffs of the leading capitalist countries remained fairly low until about 1930, with the USA as the main exception.

A spiral of beggar-my-neighbour tariffs in the 1930s crashed world trade and worsened the economic slump then.

Since World War Two it has been bourgeois orthodoxy to favour making trade barriers low, with argument only about the scale and type of the exceptions to that rule. From the 1960s the running-into-a-wall of "developmentalist" trade barrier regimes in second-tier capitalist countries from Ireland to Argentina has broadened the hold of that orthodoxy.

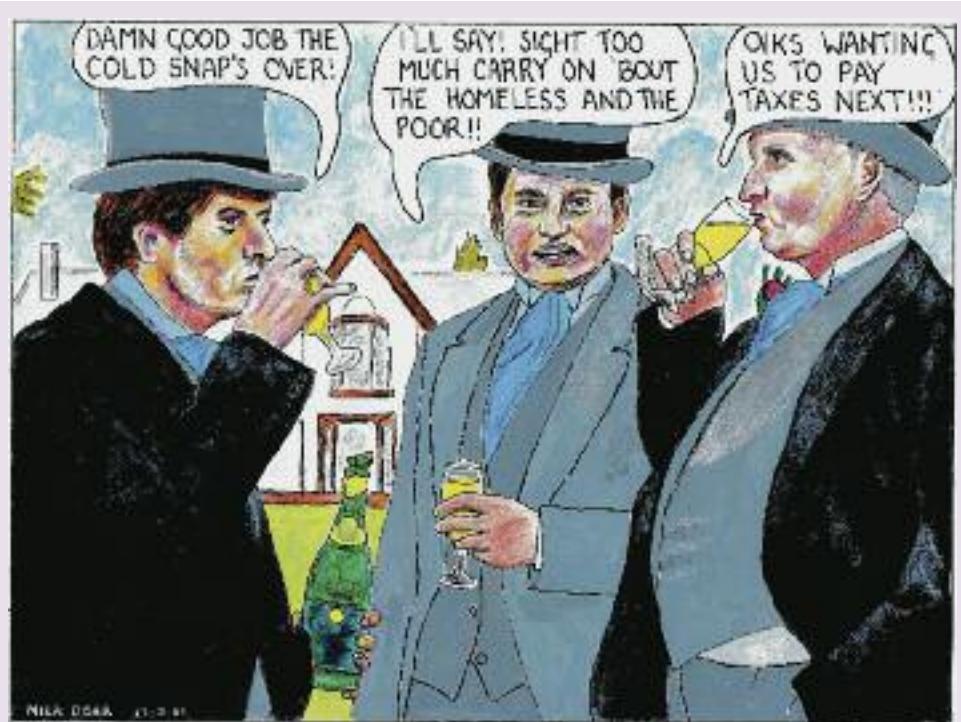
After the crash of 2008, the chief, in fact only clear-cut, decision of the emergency G20 summit of November 2008 was to demand of all governments that they avoid building trade barriers in response. On the whole, that decision held.

Trump's move spurred the Director of his National Economic Council, Gary Cohn, to resign.

Cohn had already been at odds with Trump since, last August, he criticised Trump's response to the white-supremacist demonstration then in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Research into the proposed tariffs suggested that they may save 33,000 jobs in the steel and aluminium industries, but lose 179,000 jobs in other industries dependent on affordable imported steel and aluminium (bit.ly/146-000).

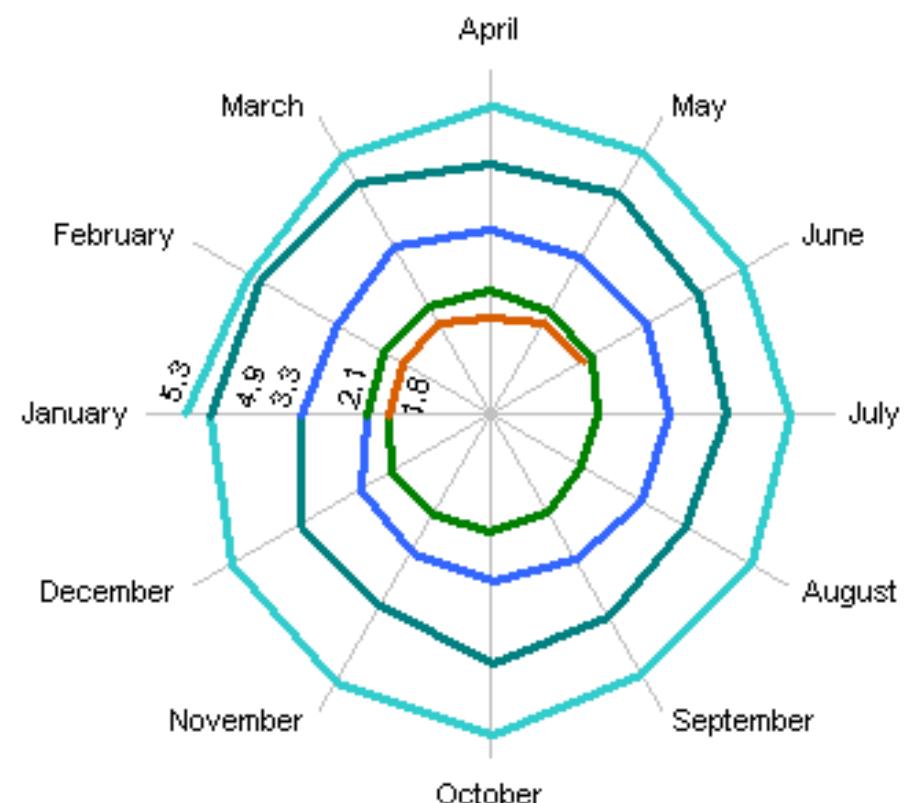
According to the *Financial Times*, the new tariffs were opposed within Trump's inner circle by Rex Tillerson, his secretary of state; Steven Mnuchin, his Treasury secretary; and Jim Mattis, his defence secretary, as well as by Cohn.



Down the plughole

World trade 1929-33, \$B

1929 1930 1931 1932 1933



League of Nations' World Economic Survey 1932-33

A spiral of beggar-my-neighbour tariffs in the 1930s crashed world trade and worsened the economic slump then.

Trump has sacked Tillerson. Mnuchin and Mattis remain in post. There is talk of Cohn being replaced by Larry Kudlow, a commentator who has publicly criticised the tariffs. Trump has hinted that the tariffs may make exceptions for Canada and Mexico. Ronald Reagan, US president from 1981 to 1989, also imposed tariffs early in his presidency. *The Economist* magazine, shrewdly from its point of view, identifies the most alarming novelty of Trump's tariffs as the pretext Trump gives in terms of the rules of the World Trade Organisation, the overseer of world trade procedures for its 164 countries and successor to GATT, set up by the USA in 1947.

DUMPING

The WTO allows for tariffs to be put on to fend off "dumping" (the sale of excess capacity at artificially low or subsidised prices) or destructive surges of imports.

Trump, however, says that the tariffs are justified by "national security". The USA, he says, needs those tariffs to keep enough steel and aluminium capacity to serve its military.

That "national security" pretext has rarely been invoked before. It is difficult to contest through WTO panels. It leaves other states with the options only of shrugging — which, they may reasonably conclude, will encourage Trump to go further — or of finding their own pretexts to retaliate. As the EU economic think-tank Bruegel puts it, Trump's move is "a challenge to the world trading system as we know it".

The Economist reckons that a general esca-

lation of tariffs among the 163 non-US members of the WTO is unlikely, even if trade barriers between those 163 and the USA increase.

Probably so, for now. Even the hardest-Brexiters among the Tories want some trade deal with the EU, and want more trade deals with non-EU states. Nationalist-populist parties in Europe like France's Front National (now trying to rename itself Rassemblement National) and Italy's Five Star Movement have, as they have looked like nearing government office, become more hesitant and vaguer about policies which might reverse European economic integration.

But that is now, when the faltering economic recovery after 2008 is at about the strongest (or least weak) it has been since then.

What in the next crisis? The crisis for which so much explosive material is accumulating in the financial markets? Will bourgeois patience and restraint hold the line then? Quite likely not.

The response of the labour movement cannot be to endorse the more far-sighted and rational elements of established bourgeois opinion.

But it must include vigorous rejection of the drift towards trade war, and of all suggestions that there is something socially-desirable or pro-working-class about the drift.

US teachers declare victory

On Tuesday 6 March teachers in West Virginia, USA, were celebrating winning all five of their demands after a nine-day statewide strike and included an occupation of the Capitol.

Teachers defeated an expansion of charter schools (similar to academy schools in the UK), a proposal to eliminate seniority, and a "paycheck-protection" bill which would have ended union dues being collected from pay. They won a significant pay rise and a mechanism to change unfair health-insurance practices.

Lois Weiner, writing for *New Politics* just before the strike won, explains how teachers organised.

This was a strike and movement organised outside the union apparatus (bit.ly/2tEOlia).

County representatives were more in touch with activists but they were not in control (read an interview with strikers here: bit.ly/2DnK2aG).

This strike took shape as it did because the existing unions had neither the credibility nor legal authority to represent the workers.

West Virginia teachers and school workers have no collective bargaining, nor the right to strike. The three unions to which teachers and school employees belong have very few members. Individual officers are well-intentioned but the organisations they head are tired, out of touch, and viewed as irrelevant.

STRIKE

Workers have not organised a "wildcat" strike because they are not violating the "no strike" provision of the contract, nor are they "defying" the union officers, whom they have never elected to speak for them, when union officers say the strike has been settled.

The union officialdom doesn't speak for the movement. The workers speak for themselves. Confusion on nomenclature reflects how remarkable this phenomenon is: we don't know how to name a movement of workers that is self-organised, not confined by the strictures of collective bargaining.

Almost all workers are affected by state and federal law to some extent, but teachers' work is enormously influenced by state laws, from the credentials they need to get their job and keep it, to their benefits and pension.

When teachers want deep change, they come up against state power. Because of the way schools are funded in West Virginia, teachers had to make their economic demands heard in the state legislature.

The government that denied their right to have a union that could bargain over salary and benefits was faced by an uprising that union officials struggled to control.

As one activist has explained to me, they are negotiating with, that is, fighting both union honchos and the state, trying to use the union apparatus while not allowing it to



Teachers occupy the State Capitol during the strike

control their movement.

The other lesson of this awesome movement is that an individual union or even a social movement of workers in one sector likely cannot win significant improvements on benefits (health care and pensions) that should be provided by the government.

We're too weak now to gain those in contract campaigns. This is especially true of public employees whose boss is the state.

The demand to "Fix PEIA," the public employee health care system, probably requires a more sustained struggle than even this powerfully solid movement can muster on its own.

To revamp its broken health care system, West Virginia teachers and school workers need to join with activists to win a single-payer system.

That's a tall order for a movement that mushroomed over a period of months, and we should not be disappointed if it doesn't do so – yet. The real leaders of this strike are teachers and school workers, not union officials.

One reason this strike has had such staying power is that teachers and other school workers are supporting one another – it's a movement of workers organised across job categories as well as competing organisations.

They have deep support from their communities, resonating with memories of struggles in the coal mines. But another key factor is the gendered nature of teachers' work and the people who do it. Teachers do "women's work" – caring for children – even if they're male. Most teachers are women.

Teachers' unions often have leaders who come from high schools, men who are "political." Female elementary school teachers generally choose to become teachers because they love kids, and their schools are generally smaller than high schools or middle schools, so they know one another better.

Teachers as a group are very law-abiding, and elementary teachers even more so. They

generally must feel very strongly to "defy" authority.

However, in my experience, when elementary teachers feel they must become "political," they show a breathtaking determination and solidarity in their union work.

At school they care for "their kids," and that nurturing carries into union work once their fire is lit. This is a #MeToo moment and movement although the strikers might not identify it that way.

SUPPORT

Neither AFT or NEA, the two national teachers unions, both with state organizations in West Virginia, have given this movement the support it deserves.

They can and should give a hefty donation to the strike fund to compensate for their lack of support so far. This movement has taught all of labour and the Left enough for us to subsidize the instruction.

West Virginia's teachers and school workers have shown unions what a mass workers' movement looks like (bit.ly/2DnI3Ty). They have inspired teachers all over the country, who are feeling frustration, even rage, at the loss of professional autonomy, overwork, and the lack of respect.

That's the tinder for strikes. It's a movement in search of leadership. Oklahoma teachers are now organising a state-wide walkout (bit.ly/2pat7TO).

The walkout is being discussed on a closed Facebook page and one suggestion gaining support is to hold it for the week when the state's standardized tests are given.

It's still too early to know whether organised labour is learning what it should from West Virginia, but teachers certainly are.

• Abridged. Originally published in *New Politics* on 4 March at bit.ly/np-lw

Tories we

By Ralph Peters

This month's visit to the UK of Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MbS), at the head of a large delegation of Saudi military and business leaders, marks a new low for the Tory government.

It also indicates a major strategic economic priority for the Tory government, as Emily Thornberry put it, "to plug the hole that will be left in Britain's trade and growth prospects ... after Brexit".

The frequent appearances of Tory Trade Secretary and arch-Brexit, Liam Fox in defending deals with Saudi Arabia was not coincidental. Thornberry might have added that the Tories in their deals with Saudi were ditching even the pretence of abiding by EU law. EU regulations bar selling arm to states where there is a risk of they may be used in a "serious violation of international humanitarian law".

In the case of Saudi Arabia that would be an understatement.

YEMEN

The casualties of the Saudi war on Yemen are now approaching the horrendous levels seen in Syria.

There has been a military enforced blockade, only partly now lifted on all goods, including food, medicine, fuel, which has created a major crisis. Save the Children reports 130 children die every day. 50,000 children died in 2017.

Most of the deaths have been from preventable diseases such as diarrhoea, malnutrition and cholera. Deaths have also resulted from the many thousands of bombs dropped on Yemen, which, by the Saudis' own admission, have targeted civilians. There are no current casualty figures available for this. But 14 months ago, the civilian death toll from bombings was reported as being more than 10,000. It will be far higher now.

The Saudi visit would undoubtedly have been used to update Tory commitments to support the war on Yemen through supplying the regime with training, ammunition and servicing of their existing Tornado and Typhoon warplanes. The visit ended with the announcement of the imminent completion of a contract with BAE Systems to supply further 48 Typhoon fighter planes.

Britain currently supplies 23% of the armaments used by Saudi Arabia, 61% coming from the US, the remainder from the rest of Europe.

REPRESSION

Within Saudi Arabia itself about nine million migrant workers live without legal rights and often in near slave dependence on their employer.

In the very week before MbS's visit two prominent Saudis, Issa al-Nukheifi and Essam Koshak, were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment (six and four years respectively) for criticising Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen, insulting the government and objecting to its decisions, criminal proceed-

Welcome “modernising” Saudi Prince

ings and security procedures.

They join probably hundreds of democrats in prison, many imprisoned as a result of post Arab Spring activism. Thousands more are in prison for various other forms of dissent.

In November 2017 a law was brought in, by which any Saudi can be jailed as a “terrorist” for five to 10 years if they portray the Saudi rulers “in a manner that brings religion or justice into disrepute.”

Executions in Saudi Arabia, traditionally by beheadings and stonings, continue at a rate that is the second or third highest on the planet, after China and Iran. In the week the Saudi delegation were in Britain, Amnesty made an appeal for 14 men whose execution was considered imminent. The offences included “high treason”, “supporting protests” and “spreading the Shi'a faith”; Shi'a Muslims are Saudi Arabia's main religious minority.

Both Saudi internal repression and external wars have intensified under MbS.

TYRANT

MbS is only 32. He and his faction of the Saudi ruling class have grown up watching enviously as Al Qaeda and then Daesh each established a major international presence.

Both of these jihadist outfits had exploited the conditions created by Saudi Arabia's fundamentalist Wahhabist doctrine being propagated across the world by the Saudi state.

Since becoming close to power MbS has also seen Saudi oil revenues dramatically reduced as prices fell.

MbS's predecessors had been happy to squander their oil money whilst stomping on any democracy at home and using their money to finance pro-Saudi movements in the Muslim world. But MbS's faction took power with the aim of “modernising” Saudi Arabia.

However, “modernising” does not mean “democracy”.

The recent lifting of the ban on women driving has been portrayed by the government and Saudi apologists as a democratic concession by the Saudi tyrants.

Foolishly Labour MP Naz Shah has lauded the Crown Prince and his “return to moderate Islam”. Going further she called for Britain to “be a candid friend to him” in the hope that the Crown Prince's “steps... will become strides”.

Fortunately, Emily Thornberry's take on the Crown Prince and his visit was not so fawning: “Theresa May tells us it is about our mutual security and strategic interests... about Prince Mohammed's moves to “liberalise” women's rights... It is all nonsense.”

Indeed. The actual reason behind giving women the right to drive was revealed by a member of Saudi Arabia's Shura Council and one of the most senior women in Saudi public life. Dr Hoda al-Helaissi, said that with the falling real values of wages, “Saudi households can no longer live comfortably on one salary”. She predicted a further 1.3 million



women would join the labour market, making women 30% of the workforce.

For the new Saudi rulers “modernisation” means becoming a major actor on the world stage, particularly the Middle East. It means using Wahhabist religious sectarianism more aggressively across the region. It involves developing a international Sunni “coalition”, now nominally responsible for the Yemen war.

They want to become the most important regional super-power, through the defeat of their main competitor, the sectarian Shi'ite state of Iran.

“Modernisation” also means developing a more diverse capitalist economy that might thrive in the markets of the Middle East as oil revenues continue to diminish. Part of the aim of the Saudi visit to Britain would have been to look for UK business partners in their imminent privatization of Aramco oil and beyond.

CLASS

Up until now the Saudi regime maintained unity within its ruling class by allowing huge bribery and corruption in its business dealings. But such corruption did not help develop the economy that MbS and his brothers-in-arms want.

To both consolidate his “anti-corruption” message and centralise his control, last November MbS arrested hundreds of Saudi's most wealthy businessmen, including eleven “princes”. One, Miteb bin Abdullah, famously bought his freedom with a cheque of \$1 billion. In total the regime claimed \$106 billion had been recovered. Others remain tagged to this day.

Unlike some other oil states such as UAE, Qatar and Kuwait, whose populations are tiny, Saudi's oil wealth is insufficient to buy

off the dissent of all its 33 million people. Some estimate that up to 35% of the Saudi population live on or below the poverty line. As subsidies for fuel and water have disappeared, and prices risen by as much as 50% in the past three years, many poorer Saudis are feeling the brunt of the regime's austerity and privatisations.

Saudi “modernisation” has increased the risk to MbS of greater dissent both amongst the elite and the poor. And he has met such possible dissent with greater repression.

Whilst there is little history of organised working class protests in Saudi, the post-Arab Spring in 2011-12 saw significant protests from the Shia minority but also from secularists yearning for democratic rights. The road ahead could be rocky.

LABOUR

During MbS's visit, Emily Thornberry correctly called for a ban on arms sales to Saudi Arabia. But Labour needs to think through the consequences of a ban on the arms trade to tyrants like the Saudis.

The British arms industry, despite only contributing 1% to GDP, is very powerful politically. As the Campaign Against Arms Trade describes it, there is a “revolving door” between the Ministry of Defence and the arms trade through such agencies as the Defence Suppliers Forum and Defence Growth Partnership. They are extensively involved in formulating policy.

Furthermore the British state cossets the private arms industry by underwriting their research costs. It sends ministers and royalty overseas to gain contracts for them. Not surprisingly whilst most heavy and light manufacturing industry have been allowed to contract massively over the last 35 years, the arms industry here and its profits are as

strong as ever.

By last September, War Child UK had estimated that the British armaments industry had £6 billion of trade and made £600,000 profit and from supplying Saudi for its war on Yemen alone! This obscene trade in death must be ended. The arms industry must be recognised as the force it is and confronted.

Labour should not just threaten action against supplying arms to regimes committing war crimes like Saudi, it needs to publicly campaign on this.

It needs to prevent the well-connected arms lobbies from generating fear for jobs lost as any arms contracts are cancelled. It needs to act on the TUC policy to create a trade union and Labour Defence Diversification Agency to plan the redeployment of the skilled workforce from the armaments industry into environmentally useful public works. It needs to take the arms industry into democratically accountable public ownership.

But it also needs to be consistent in its treatment of those states who abuse human rights.

Emily Thornberry rightly drew attention to the Tories' double standards by asking why Saudi was treated different to Iran with its “similar record of domestic human rights abuses, regional intervention and alleged support for terror organisations”.

But the Labour Party too needs to be consistent. Although Britain may not now supply arms to Iran, the labour movement could influence events there and in countries that support the Iranian regime.

Labour should give solidarity to those struggling for democratic rights as well as condemn governments like Russia that arm Iran and its proxy state in Syria.

The labour movement should give solidarity to all people fighting tyranny.

TV fictions and AWL reality

REASON IN REVOLT

An open letter to Ashok Kumar

It's been said before, and it will bear saying again. If everything published by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty in the last five decades were to disappear, and if future historians of socialism had to rely on what our political opponents said about us, then the historians would find it impossible to make political sense of the story.

On the one hand we are people who do, and have always done, everything we can to help workers in their struggle against employers and governments. We throw everything we have into that.

We preach working-class revolutionary socialism, and work to educate those we can in the politics of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, James Connolly, Antonio Gramsci, and the other socialists of their school. Now and always, we oppose and fight all shades of race, national, or gender discrimination, exclusion, and inequality.

Against today's populist-chauvinists, we advocate free movement of people. We are for freedom of religion, within the laws that protect children. We are for freedom of atheist propaganda.

In the socialist archipelago, we advocate unity of socialists in action and democratic dialogue about our differences.

In national and similar conflicts we advocate — after Lenin — consistent democracy. That means that we are against all denial of self-determination to nations. Where there are intractable national and communal conflicts, we advocate working-class unity across the communal and national divides, and, democratic arrangements on disputed territory.

That is the approach we take to the Israeli-Arab conflict, for example. Our basic principles were set out in a resolution which Lenin wrote for the Bolshevik Party in 1913:

"Insofar as national peace is in any way possible in a capitalist society based on exploitation, profit-making and strife, it is attainable only under a consistently and thoroughly democratic republican system of government which guarantees full equality of all nations and languages, which recognises no compulsory official language... and the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one nation and any encroachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority. This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local self-government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local population".

And yet we are vilified, reviled, denounced in much of the ostensible left. We are "racists", "imperialist agents".

The latest notable example of that approach was yourself on Sky News, 4 March. Asked to comment on the press, you took an article from *The Daily Express* denouncing the AWL as left subversives in Labour and said of AWL that we are a "chauvinist organisation", that we are "right-wing", that we supported "wars" and "colonial settler states".

Julie Bindel countered that with the Labour Party run by "posh Stalinists", it is difficult not to be "right-wing".

You have to stand realities on their head to

classify us as right-wing, even for the sake of argument, but Bindel's underlying thought was just.

The difference between us and, say, you, is not a difference between right and left, but between people who try to be consistent and principled Marxists, and eclectics like yourself letting yourselves be blown by the political winds.

Opinion, even grossly mistaken opinion, is one thing; hard facts another. Which "wars" have we supported? When? We opposed and marched against the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. As between your "left" and ours, the shoe is on the other foot. The ostensible left which you identify with backs war against Israel.

We have not backed war or wars, other than wars of national liberation like those of the Kurds against Daesh and against Turkey.

Chauvinists? What sort of chauvinists? British chauvinists? European chauvinists? White chauvinists? Cultural chauvinists? Religious chauvinists?

Our active record against racism will stand scrutiny better than that of some of our ostensible-left critics, better than the SWP's, for instance. We have advocated and taken part in initiatives for black self-defence against police and freelance racists.

Or do you mean that we are anti-Islamic chauvinists? We have taken part in action to defend Muslim populations in Britain against marching fascists, as has, I guess, everyone on the left. We opposed the vile colonial war which Russia waged against the Muslims of Afghanistan through the 1980s. The SWP did that then too, but much of the ostensible left did not.

BOSNIA

We backed the Muslim victims of Serbian ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. So did many others on the left (but not the SWP).

We backed the ethnic-Albanian Muslims, the 93% majority in Kosova, against the Serbian state murdering them or driving them out. So did some others on the left, but most of the ostensible left, and in the first place the SWP, organised a "Stop the War" campaign that backed Serbia and made lying propaganda on behalf of the genocidal Serbian state.

I saw on the internet a comment by one enlightened citizen, a youngster I think, that the "AWL are potential fascists". To make sense of that, I had to stop and think. What could he possibly mean?

I concluded that he had in mind our hostility to political Islam — as to political Catholicism, etc.

A number of things have to be examined separately here. Let me first repeat: we have been and are defenders of Muslims as of others against discrimination, exclusion, and violence. We have a long record to prove we take that seriously.

We are of course against all religious schools. The state should take responsibility for properly educating all children. Religion should be outside of that.

Secular education is a fundamental principle not only of socialism but of consistent liberalism. There should be no Muslim religious schools. Or Catholic or Jewish or Church of England schools.

Most Muslims in Britain are poor, but they are part of a world religion that includes people and states of vast riches. The outlook and culture of many religious Muslims, tied into the worldwide nexus, lines them up with cul-

tural and intellectual reaction.

All religions are logically intolerant. For those who take a religion seriously, it is the one and only truth. Today, in much of the world, Islam is the most vigorous, and often the most politicised religion.

Thus many Muslims can be and have been mobilised to de-

mand that their religious standards and sensibilities be imposed on people and on societies which do not accept them, and, some, frequently, to threaten violence unless they get their way.

Such demands from Catholics, for instance, should be rejected, and the influence of those making the demands resisted and stigmatised. The left has done that where Catholicism has been strong in politics, and even where many of the Catholics mobilised for reactionary demands have been socially-disadvantaged people. For instance the left should mobilise against Catholic groups who intimidate women outside abortion clinics.

The same should go for Muslims. Otherwise we betray the best values of bourgeois civilisation, and what should be the governing principles of socialists or even consistent libertarians.

The socialist who confuses resistance to racism, discrimination, and exclusion with a supposed duty to "defend" political-Muslim activists on reactionary causes have lost the political plot.

Finally, the charge that we support colonial-settler states.

As it happens, a large part of the globe is made of colonial-settler states, from the USA to Argentina to Australia. You mean, of course, Israel. Yes, we support Israel's right to exist and to defend itself. So too, by the way, does the Palestinian Authority accept Israel's right to exist.

The only alternative is to support Arab and Islamic chauvinists in a war to conquer Israel — and then what? To drive out or slaughter the Israeli Jews? What else? 600,000 Jews were driven out of Arab countries over the years following the establishment of Israel in 1948.

The basic socialist value of consistent democracy provides the only solution to the conflict: two states. An independent Palestinian state in contiguous territory, side by side with Israel.

There are two versions of a "one-state" solution, that of the Israeli right and that of Arab and Islamic chauvinists. Either version offers horrendous prospects for both Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews: endless decades of national-communal conflict, with either a big Arab minority in an Israeli state, or an Arab majority with a big Jewish minority, and the discrimination and conflict that will go with either.

We do not think that Israel should be subjugated and destroyed, and its Jewish people put at the mercy of the conquerors. But whatever anyone thinks, that is not calculably going to happen. It presupposes tremendous



United in anti-AWLism: George Galloway and Nigel Farage. Now joined by *The Daily Express* and Ashok Kumar

shifts in world politics and world alignments.

Those who advocate it use lamentations for the Palestinians as part of their political patter. But they are not true friends of the Palestinians. "Smash Israel" politics imply an endless purgatory for the Palestinians — and it is significant that the majority of Palestinians do not now support those politics.

The only possible program that can help the Palestinians — the living Palestinians, not the cipher in the hands of Arab and Islamic chauvinists and their would-be "anti-imperialist" supporters — is to have their own state alongside Israel.

Israel was made viable by people fleeing from Nazi murder in Europe and from the Displaced Persons' camps after World War Two. Certainly, Israel is not solely responsible for the plight of the Palestinian refugees: so too are the Arab states that refused to let them rebuild their lives, or, sometimes, even to work.

In 1948 there were 750,000 Palestinian refugees. The claim now, when most of the 1948 people will in the nature of things have died, that there are six million Palestinian refugees, is an ideological lie. It embodies the claim that the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the 1948 refugees have, by virtue of their ancestry, more right in the territory of Israel than those who have grown up there.

Define Israel as a colonial-settler state if you like, but for truth to reality you have to add the things that make it different from other colonial-settler states, and the fact that there was a longstanding Jewish minority in Palestine (or what was until 1918 part of the Turkish province of Syria), a majority in Jerusalem in 1900, for example, a nucleus towards which the refugees from Europe of the 1920s and 1930s fled.

The history has been a tragic one for both Jews and Arabs. The tragedies can be mitigated, and begin to cease, only by way of a two-states settlement.

AWL's adverse reputation in the ostensible left arises from the fact that we try to be consistent democrats and socialists on questions such as Israel-Palestine; from the politically decomposed state the left is in; from the prevalent unreason and displaced emotion on the left on such questions; and from the incomprehension and malice of people who are often at the end of their tether in grasping what is happening in the world.

Not we, but those who, to put it at its weakest, have sympathised and sided with religio-political reaction, are the people who have lost the plot.

Yours, Sean Matgamna

Behind Wakanda's utopian vision

Sameem Rahimi reviews 'Black Panther'

Firstly, I like Black Panther as a character. My first introduction him was in the highly acclaimed (and short lived) 'Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes' TV series from 2010.

The portrayal of this character was that of a stoic, no nonsense, quiet member of the team, who relied on his instincts and intellect to overcome more powerful enemies.

I then decided to read up on him and encountered him in the Fantastic Four comics taking on the 'Silver Surfer', again using his superior intellect to take on the all-powerful herald of Galactus, and defeat him. In my eyes, Black Panther was effectively the closest marvel had to Batman, a rich dude who made up for his lack of powers with his cunning and intellect.

From a representation point of view it's great this movie was produced, and even better it was so well received. Comics have a variety of heroes from different ethnic/national backgrounds and although black characters have appeared in comic book movies before (Blade, Spawn), never has one been made about an African superhero.

In this regard, we should praise this film and hope it will allow more blockbuster movies to be made about cultures and societies that aren't based in North America and Europe.

That being said, I'll be frank and say I didn't enjoy the film. This movie takes place after 'Captain America: Civil War'. T'challa (Chadwick Boseman) is the new king of Wakanda, an isolated technologically ad-

vanced African nation powered by the mysterious element "vibranium", and now tasked with defending his kingdom from outside powers.

His first task is the apprehension of the Augmented criminal/thief, Ulysses Klaue (Andy Serkis), responsible for stealing vibranium and killing several Wakandans in the process. The brilliant Michael B. Jordan also appears as the ruthless Killmonger, an ally of Klaue's with links to Wakanda.

Maybe it's because I'm fatigued from lots of superhero movies. The SFX, the super advanced aircrafts, the futuristic cities, have been done before, and weren't anything new.

SPIRIT

The action was formulaic, and considering this was a film about a man imbued with the spirit of the panther god, I felt the Black Panther's portrayal was disappointing. There was no attempt to illustrate his genius or cunning.

What about the story, though? The story does have political themes, in my opinion bad politics. Let me explain.

Wakandan society, despite its advances, is a tribal society ruled by a monarch, the Black Panther. Despite Wakanda's wealth and power, it actively pursued an isolationist policy (not letting anyone in or out of the country), at the request of its ruling elite.

It hid itself throughout the ages, aware of the colonisation and pillaging of the rest of the continent. This is not solidarity. This is addressed by the introduction of the character Killmonger. Michael B. Jordan's character becomes the primary antagonist. Why is he significant?



Audiences in Africa (pictured, a Senegalese audience) have flocked to see 'Black Panther'.

By far the most interesting character, an African American (of Wakandan blood and T'challa's cousin), he experiences first hand the discrimination and prejudice in White America that his countrymen haven't.

This breeds within him solidarity towards not just his fellow African Americans but Black people oppressed across the world. It leads him to pursue the Wakandan throne, in an attempt to emancipate his people across the world by using the kingdom as a means to provide them with arms to defend themselves. I wouldn't call him a revolutionary. He doesn't pursue power via revolutionary means but by the formal means (trial by combat) of the Wakandan elite.

He accepts the throne and the title of Black Panther, and in doing so embraces the pre-

vailing order, the archaic and oppressive practices of the Wakandan elite. This isn't a revolution.

Overall, what can I say about the movie? It's certainly colourful and vibrant. You can see what the writers and the directors of the movie are going for. Wakanda is presented as the near-ideal African nation, a techno-utopia that thrived as it was untouched by colonialism, and T'challa as Plato's Philosopher King.

However this film isn't progressive, and its important to mention this. Look across the liberal media outlets hailing this as a progressive breakthrough. In reality all it does is perpetuate certain regressive ideas.

Particularly the way an undemocratically appointed ruling elite can be allowed to have tyranny over a large population.

When Labour councils resisted Tory housing policy

Rosalind Robson continues with the story of the 1972 resistance to the Housing Finance Act by Clay Cross council in Derbyshire

That the Labour council of the small Derbyshire town of Clay Cross fought a Tory government over its policy of raising rents by an act of Parliament — the 1972 Housing Finance Act — is well known.

What is less well known is that Clay Cross was not the only council or set of councillors to initially opposed the Act. In fact hundreds of Labour councillors initially refused to implement the Act. Eventually all but a few, including eleven Clay Cross councillors, gave in, partly because of the intervention of the Labour leadership, partly out of fear of punishment by the state, and partly because the opposition was not co-ordinated.

A later installment will also tell a lesser known story of how many tenants refused to pay raised rents, often in opposition to Labour councillors who had implemented the Act.

In July 1971 Ted Heath's Tory government introduced a White Paper, A Fair Deal for Housing. The intention was to raise the rents of both local authority and private tenants by setting high so-called "fair rents". Labour Weekly later leaked the Housing Ministry's estimate of fair rents. The figure for the East Midlands area in which Clay Cross falls, was

£5.14p per week. The rents in Clay Cross then averaged £1.50.

Those who could not afford the "fair rent" would be eligible for means-tested rebates. The idea was that better off tenants would subsidise the rent of less well-off tenants and also ensure the state could save money on housing benefits.

This was in fact an attack on better off working-class people, and Labour's electoral base. At the time Labour was very strongly represented in local councils. Also, apart from in places like Clay Cross, rents had been creeping up.

In Clay Cross soon after the publication of the White Paper a series of public meetings were held to discuss the proposals, inviting the view of both private and council tenants. There had been a tradition of holding such meetings, to allow for public consultation on the council's business.

A letter was written to the Tory Housing Minister Julian Amery telling him that the council would refuse to operate the policy. At this stage, it seemed that there were many other councils set on a course of defiance and it was unlikely that the Government would attempt action against them.

But the government did have a potential escalating programme of punitive measures at its disposal.

Firstly, the Secretary of State for the Environment could initiate a formal enquiry into the conduct of a local council.

Secondly, the a notice that a council would

be issued with a default notice and the council then had one month to prepare a defence.

Thirdly, a default notice was issued which might or might not be accompanied with a public enquiry.

Finally a variety of sanctions could be imposed, including the council being taken over by a Housing Commissioner, a withdrawal of subsidies for housing programmes, personal financial penalties on councillors (to recoup the loss in rent receipts). In extreme cases the councillors could be compelled to obey the law on pain of being found in contempt of court (and then jailed).

PENALTIES

It is worth saying that these penalties, particularly the ones that can be imposed on individual councillors, are less punitive today than in 1972.

Councillors can still be disqualified, but it is much harder; and they can no longer be jailed or heavily fined and bankrupted.

Early in 1972 Clay Cross was getting some national attention — it was one of two councils to feature in TV programmes about the legislation. The councillors upped the ante on this fight by calling the Act an "abattoir for the slaughter of council house tenants."

On 10 June 1972 233 councillors from 87 groups of Labour councillors met in Sheffield to co-ordinate opposition to the Act. A Working Party was set up. Unfortunately this Working Party came under pressure from the

Labour leadership (Labour was led by Harold Wilson at the time) and wound up merely proposing a deputation to the Tory Prime Minister. There was no campaign for non-implementation, despite a lot of uncoordinated feeling in favour of non-implementation.

At the 1972 Labour conference, later in the year, vague support was given to the campaign against the now passed Act, and the National Executive Committee was instructed to back up any councillors that defaulted on implementing the Act. Many Labour-controlled local authorities dodged the confrontation by part-raising rents, but by so doing that had set in train the mechanics of the legislation.

In the end there were three groups of councils that refused to implement to one degree or another.

Those who never implemented were Clay Cross and Bedwas and Machen in south Wales (although this council co-operated with the Housing Commissioner running its housing from December 1972).

A large group of around a dozen councils, many in Scotland, held out until sometime into 1973.

32 others held out between October 1972 and January 1973. Of those, Camden, Merthyr and Clydebank had state intervention applied.

• Next issue: the fight heats up in Clay Cross

Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

- ¥ Independent working-class representation in politics.
- ¥ A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- ¥ A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- ¥ Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- ¥ A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- ¥ Open borders.
- ¥ Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- ¥ Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- ¥ Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- ¥ Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!



Events

Tuesday 20 March

Bring Carillion staff at British Museum back in-house
12.30pm, British Museum, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3DG
bit.ly/2p9vuHv

Saturday 24 March

Reimagining Local Government
11am, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL
bit.ly/2oumcWe

Saturday 24 March

Surround Yarl's Wood demo
1pm, Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre, Bedford MK44 1RF
bit.ly/2GqCnLG

Saturday 14 April

Leeds March for the NHS
11.30am, Leeds Art Gallery, The Headrow, Leeds LS1 3AA
bit.ly/2p8mDpf

Saturday 28 April

Sheffield March for the NHS
1.30pm, Barker's Pool, Sheffield S1 2JA
bit.ly/2IqM5P6

Saturday 5 May

'We are the lions, Mr Manager' — play about the Grunwick strike
7.30pm, Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess St, Manchester M1 6DD
bit.ly/2FHsS9N

Have an event you want listing? Email:
solidarity@workersliberty.org

General Secretary: debate the issues!

LABOUR

By Keith Road

The withdrawal of Jon Lansman from the contest to replace Iain McNicol as the next Labour Party General Secretary makes almost certain that Jennie Formby will get the job.

The contest should have been an opportunity to talk about what a left-led Labour Party should be like in its culture and structures. It became an opaque fight where any differences between candidates were unclear and impossible for ordinary Labour members to decode.

For that reason it was absolutely right — if you take his stated reasons for standing on face value — for Jon Lansman to stand.

He was right against the leadership of the Labour Party who wanted Unite official Jennie Formby to get the job and who rushed to endorse her.

As it stands the only other declared candidate is Paul Hilder, a digital entrepreneur, a director of Crowdpac and one of the founders of OpenDemocracy; he is a Momentum member.

But it is more than a matter of

having a choice of contender.

Formby has the support of the majority of the National Executive Committee's "left caucus". 17 MPs as well as the Labour Representation Committee and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) have also stated their support.

But the appointment to this highly important and influential position should be made by a proper democratic process. The rules state that in the event of a vacancy for General Secretary the National Executive Committee can select the new secretary subject to the approval of Party Conference. In practice this will mean a rubber stamping of their decision. This position should be elected at Conference, with regional hustings organised in the run up.

The desire to rush the appointment reflects, as, the New Socialist website puts it, a "siege mentality" among the established sections of the Labour left.

Since 2015, Corbyn has survived a leadership challenge, a General Election, and fought to win left control of the NEC, and the Disputes Committee chair. The left has just started to gain control in local branches and local Labour Parties.



Jennie Formby

The "siege mentality", which has in some quarters, created a destructive factional mood, and distaste for debate on the left has to end. Now is the time for the left to change gear and begin to talk about key differences in strategy and politics. This contest could still help us begin that.

While the issues are still to be explained, we do not share the view that the entire Labour left must unite around a particular candidate.

Trans women: the scaremongering must stop

By Gemma Short

According to reports on social media over 200 women are planning a "mass resignation" from the Labour Party over the party's stance on including trans women on all-women shortlists.

A group calling itself "Mayday4Women" says they "have over 200 women (100-plus happy to be named, 100-plus anonymous) who intend to collectively resign should the next National Executive Committee meeting pass self-identification for All-Women shortlists".

On their Facebook page the group repeatedly refer to the issue as being one of "men self-identifying onto All-Women Shortlists".

The mass resignation was originally timed for International Women's Day. It didn't materialise. One person who was suspended pending investigation by the Labour Party has resigned before the outcome of that investigation.

This "mass resignation" is the latest in what has been a horrible campaign by some in the Party against trans people, mostly trans women. Some, at least initially, couched this in terms of "legitimate concerns or questions" about the proposed amendments to the Gender Recognition Act, or of the in-practice implications of the use of self-identification for All-Women Shortlists.

However that mask slipped very quickly. People involved in the campaign routinely and deliberately call trans women men. They have celebrated the resignation of

Munroe Bergdorf from Labour's LGBT advisory committee (on the basis that as a trans woman she should not be in the role).

It is expected that the Labour Party will endorse the party's current status-quo of all self-identified women being allowed on All-Women Shortlists. That will be the right decision.

Self-identification has been the norm in large sections of the labour movement for a while. A large number of other organisations also allow it without detriment to women, including those who work with women who are survivors of sexual violence.

Most women are not asked to "prove" their gender. We should not be in the business of saying

some women don't look or act enough like women and should be asked for "proof".

Obtaining a Gender Recognition Certificates is a bureaucratic, often personally difficult, and costly process. Many transwomen will not have one, or not have one yet, or do not want one. We should not be demanding they get it in order to recognise and include them.

Why is there scaremongering over men entering All-Women Shortlists? There is not a queue of men who are going to identify as women to enter all-women shortlists. Why would they when life in politics (and in general) is much easier as a man?

This is scaremongering and it must stop.



International Women's Day strike

By Gemma Short

Workers at four Picturehouse cinemas in London struck on International Women's Day, Thursday 8 March.

Workers and supporters picketed Picturehouse Central in Soho, and the picket line was addressed by TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady. The picket line was later joined by about 500 people from the Women's March event, which for a period of time created such an effective picket line that no customers were able to get through the crowd to go into the cinema.

Writing for the *Clarion* magazine in advance of the strike, sacked Ritzy Cinema rep Kelly Rogers said:

"In the context of the abusive histories of Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey, Gary Oldman and others, the world is – rightly – talking about the problems of powerful, entitled men, sexism and sexual abuse that are rampant in the film industry. But it doesn't end at the big names. Thousands of women workers at the lower-paid end of the industry, cinema workers included, not only experience widespread harassment from customers and managers, but also an economic exploitation that is very much gendered. Low pay, precarious contracts and poor conditions are all things predominantly experienced by women workers, especially migrant women."

"The feminist aspects of the Picturehouse strike go beyond just the demand for maternity pay. Jobs seen as 'women's work', such as cleaning, nursing and caring, the service industry, secretarial work, have historically been underpaid as well as precarious, for both women and men in them. Supposedly 'flex-



ible' zero-hours contract jobs are more likely to be occupied by women working around caring and other responsibilities.

HARASSMENT

"The service industry has a problem with sexual harassment.

"In Unite's 'Not on the Menu' survey of hospitality workers, 89% of respondents said they had experienced one or more incidents of sexual harassment in their working life. 56.3% said they had been targeted by a member of the public. 22.7% said they had been harassed by a manager.

"Strikes are about, but not just about, defending our rights at work in an immediate way. Workers withdrawing our labour is a political act, it is a rejection of the idea that our bosses should control our lives. We should be discussing the wider political issues too. Picture-

house's parent company Cineworld made over £90 million in profit last year: why are they not taxed more? Why is the Minimum Wage so low? Why are companies not legally obliged to pay proper maternity and paternity pay?

"The labour movement has not always been good at organising and fighting for the rights of precarious workers, or women workers, and the feminist movement has often neglected working-class women's struggles."

As *Solidarity* went to press workers from the Ritzy cinema were striking to coincide with the employment tribunal for three of their union reps who were sacked.

Workers are now discussing the next steps in the campaign, including how to get more cinemas involved.

• Read the full article by Kelly Rogers online at: bit.ly/2p8oBWG

More DOO strikes

By Charlotte Zalens

Guards on Southern Rail struck again on Monday 12 March in the ongoing dispute about Driver Only Operation (DOO).

This strike was the 40th day of strikes for guards on Southern.

Guards on Northern and Merseyrail also struck on 3 March. 13 March marks the year anniversary of the Merseyrail strike. On the anniversary of the strike guards' union, RMT, is lobbying the Merseyside Labour Metro Mayor. Due to the contract that Merseyrail has with the City Council the council has been re-

paying Merseyrail any losses incurred from the strike. The RMT said in a press release: "RMT has learned that the vast majority of Labour councillors have not been told by the senior council leaders that their local authorities are bankrolling this private, cash rich train company. It is an absolute scandal that just as councillors are agonising over budget cuts; all six local authorities are exposed to an unknown amount of liability simply in order to write the Merseyrail bosses a blank cheque."

More strikes have been confirmed on Northern for 26-29 March.

Same job? Same pay!

By Peggy Carter

Unison members in the non-emergency patient transport service in Greater Manchester have voted to strike over low pay and disparity of terms and conditions between workers doing the same job.

Workers voted unanimously for strikes, on an 86% turn out. The workers are employed by the North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust, but the service was out-

sourced to Arriva between 2013 and 2016. Arriva employed workers on inferior terms and conditions, and these have remained in place after the service was transferred to back to the NHS. This resulted in some workers being on inferior terms and conditions for doing the exact same job.

Workers recruited on the Arriva contract earn £2.40 less an hour, and have fewer breaks and less sick pay than those recruited by the NHS.

DLR workers to strike again

By Ollie Moore

Outsourced cleaners and security staff employed by ISS on London's Docklands Light Railway will strike on 21 March.

They will be joined by colleagues directly employed by Keolis Amey Docklands (KAD), the consortium which runs the DLR for Transport

for London.

Although the disputes are separate, both involve employers failing to honour commitments around rostering and shift patterns.

This will be the fifth strike of ISS workers on the DLR, but the first which will involve parallel action from KAD staff. KAD workers will additionally strike from 20-24 April.

Victory for Southwark teachers over box-ticking culture

By a Southwark teacher

Teachers at the City of London Academy Southwark have won significant improvements after three days of strikes by the National Education Union, 1 March and 7-8 March.

A union group meeting on Monday 12 March voted to suspend further strikes, scheduled for 13-15 March while management carries through its promises to redraft appraisal and support-plan policies in consultation with the union.

The strikes drew over 40 teachers to the picket lines on each day, despite snow and winds on the first day.

Management kept the school open for Years 10-11, and for Years 12-13 to do mock exams, but support staff inside the school report that very little teaching was done on those days.

The final sticking point was the

fate of four teachers on "support plans" which, the union said, were imposed unfairly and were punitive rather than supportive.

After insisting that the "support plans" must stay, and that appraisal policy had been decided at academy-chain (MAT) level and was immovable, management agreed to rewrite policy and said that the "support plans" consequently "no longer existed".

Even before the strikes, management had conceded that the "failed" verdicts passed on 17 teachers in the last performance management cycle were flawed, and had reversed almost all of them.

The dispute saw teachers not previously at all active in the union becoming vocal. One teacher produced a leaflet citing research that an "inadequate" verdict from a lesson observation is 90% likely not to be corroborated by an independent

observer.

Placards on the picket lines said "Kids don't belong on spreadsheets" and "Not everything that can be counted, counts. Not everything that counts, can be counted". This was also a broader rebellion against the box-ticking, punitive approach increasingly imposed on the school since the construction of a full-scale management structure

for the MAT.

Negotiations in the dispute were increasingly run from the management side by the MAT CEO, bypassing the Head of School.

Other schools in the MAT, except maybe Highbury Grove, remain less strongly-unionised than Southwark. Talks are underway for a MAT-wide recognition agreement. The creation of a MAT-wide lay

union committee is urgent.

So is the consolidation of union organisation at Southwark, where, despite the dispute victory, many teachers had already decided to leave the school, and next year will see a big turnover of staff.

• More: nutcola.wordpress.com

Strikes over pay and academisation

By Gemma Short

Workers at Connaught school in Walthamstow, London, and Avenue school in Newham, London, were both on strike on Tuesday 13 March.

School workers at Avenue school have been fighting the proposed conversion of their school to

an academy. Avenue strikers have been had support from parents and the local labour movement. This has included lobbies of the Labour council, including by Labour members, over the council's support for academies.

Workers at Connaught school are striking after their demands for a pay increase were rejected. The school is in the outer London pay

band and teachers demanded an additional £1,000 on top of their existing salary for the next two years, and to have their wages increased to meet the inner London pay rate by 2020.

The difference between outer London and inner London pay scales has not matched the reality of living costs in London for a long time, and a small number of schools in the outer London area voluntarily pay the inner London rate.



Turkey out of Afrin!



By Simon Nelson

Lively and disruptive protests took place on Sunday 11 March at Kings Cross and Manchester Piccadilly rail stations, blocking the track in Manchester and closing King's Cross.

They have pushed the Turkish military assault on Kurdish-held Afrin in Syria back into the headlines.

While a siege on the enclave of Eastern Ghouta has dominated much press coverage, what has happened in Afrin has been just as brutal.

Turkey, a NATO member, is also

conducting a siege, surrounding Afrin, "neutralising" almost 4,000 combatants, and shelling positions of the Kurdish militia, the YPG. 35,000 people lived in Afrin prior to Turkey's operation, and they are likely to suffer a similar fate to the population of Eastern Ghouta. Hundreds more will die unless the combatants there manage to beat back Turkey. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the US-backed YPG-led group, has now called more of its forces back from fighting the remnants of Daesh to defend Afrin.

But Turkey is also not fighting alone. Sections of the Free Syrian

Army, which Turkey has long supported, is now facing off against the Kurdish YPG. Turkey is also allied with Syrian regime backed troops and militias which plan to go from Afrin right through to Manbij on the Iraqi border.

ERDOGAN

Turkish President Erdogan wants to do as much damage as possible to the YPG and to end the possibility of any Kurdish-controlled contiguous territory, particularly by the Turkish border.

Erdogan has said Afrin is a majority Arab area and that one of the

aims of Operation Olive Branch is, "to give Afrin back to its rightful owners"!

Some sources say Kurdish civilians in Afrin are being treated as human shields by the YPG and are unlikely to leave for fear of being killed as they flee by Turkish troops. The YPG deny that they plan to anyone as human shields. At the same time the Kurdish media reports that "volunteers" are heading to Afrin to do just that.

Turkey's partners in the FSA are made up of Arab-chauvinists, and Islamists who spent much of the early years of the conflict in Syria trying to drive the Kurds out of the

oil-rich territories they now control. The gains the Kurds made with the backing of the USA, particularly at the expense of the Islamist groups, will only have exacerbated the FSA's determination to crush them.

Turkish forces have some limited experience of fighting the PKK, the YPG's parent organisation in the streets of South Eastern Turkey in 2015 and 2016. In all these encounters there was huge loss of civilian life.

Kurds will continue to be slaughtered unless Turkey is pushed out of Afrin.

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